



Zenadth Kes Inner Islands Youth Strategy 2025 – 2030 (DRAFT*)

A community initiative led by the Project Steering Committee and Youth Research Group.

Draft for community and stakeholder feedback*

October 2024

Note: Once the content is finalised, the Strategy will be professionally edited and visually designed.

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Acknowledgment of Country

We pay respect to the Traditional Owners and Custodians of the lands and waters on which we work. We honour the resilience and continuing connection to land and sea country, culture and community of all Torres Strait Islander peoples and Aboriginal peoples across Australia. We recognise the decisions we make today will impact the lives of generations to come.

Acknowledgment of Support

We extend our sincere appreciation to all project stakeholders for your support in the development of the Inner Islands Youth Strategy.

We specifically acknowledge members of the Project Steering Group and Youth Research Group. Your local knowledge, essential feedback and continued support has been crucial in shaping and guiding the outcomes of this project.

A special thank you to our key collaborators, including the Torres Strait Regional Authority, Tagai State College, Thursday Island Community Justice Group, Torres Strait Kaziw Meta, Island Stars, Mura Kosker Sorority, Torres Health, and the Kaurareg Native Title Aboriginal Corporation. Your hard work and passion for culture, young people and community enabled meaningful local connections, engagement, and findings.

Our sincere gratitude to all the young people from the Inner Islands who participated in conversations, forums, workshops, and surveys. Thank you for sharing your experiences, and for trusting us with your challenges, hopes, and dreams.

Thank you to Eileen Solomon (Secondary Student), Gab Titui Indigenous Art Awards entrant 2023 for licensing her artwork, *My Island Home*, for use in the Youth Strategy engagement and promotional materials.

The Zenadth Kes Inner Island Youth Strategy (*the Youth Strategy*) brings together the diverse experiences and perspectives of young people, service providers and the broader community from the Inner Islands of the Torres Strait.

At the same time, they are also grappling to make sense of issues like racism, discrimination, cost of living, bullying, mental health, domestic violence, homelessness, and climate change.

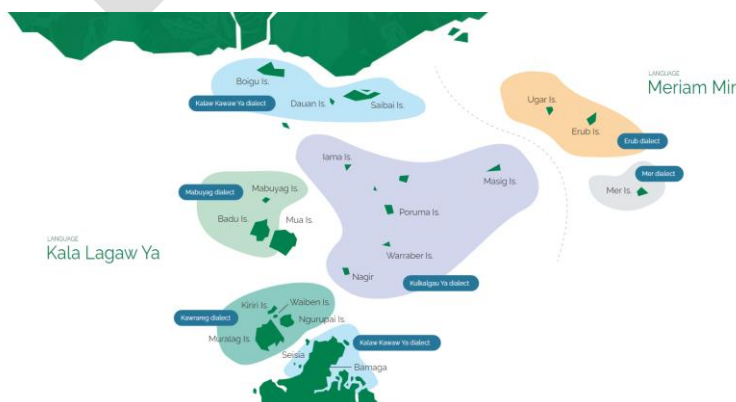
Just like any other community member on the Inner Islands, young people are trying to make sense of their lives and the world. They have lived experiences to share and unique perspectives about their communities and futures. Recognising the diverse stages, needs, and challenges faced by young people during this period is essential for effectively supporting them as they navigate these transformative years.

The Youth Strategy focuses on young people, aged 12 to 25, on the Inner Islands of the Torres Strait - Waiben (Thursday Island), Ngurapai (Horn Island), Kiririri (Hammond Island) and Muralag (Prince of Wales Island). It provides a strategic framework that can be used to genuinely engage and deliver culturally responsive and youth-centred programs, services, and policies, with the aim of improving options and opportunities for young people across the Inner Islands.

It has been designed to support young people to feel confident, proud, and valued, elevating their voices in community, government policy and decision making.

With *Culture, Identity and Well-being* at its heart, the *Youth Strategy* outlines 6 themes known as ‘Guiding Stars’ to support young people to navigate a self-determined path towards their best life. Each Guiding Star includes high level priorities described by young people.

The successful implementation of this Youth Strategy relies on clear, collaborative leadership and an appropriately resourced plan of action.



About the development of the Youth Strategy

Governance

The *Zenadth Kes Inner Island Youth Strategy (the Youth Strategy)* has broad community ownership. The development of the Youth Strategy was governed by a Project Steering Group which included local service provider representation and three levels of government. In parallel, a Youth Research Group, whose membership was made-up of young people, played a vital role in guiding engagement and providing advice, knowledge and experience into the development of the Youth Strategy.

The Torres Strait Regional Authority funded and managed the project through the Safe Communities Program.

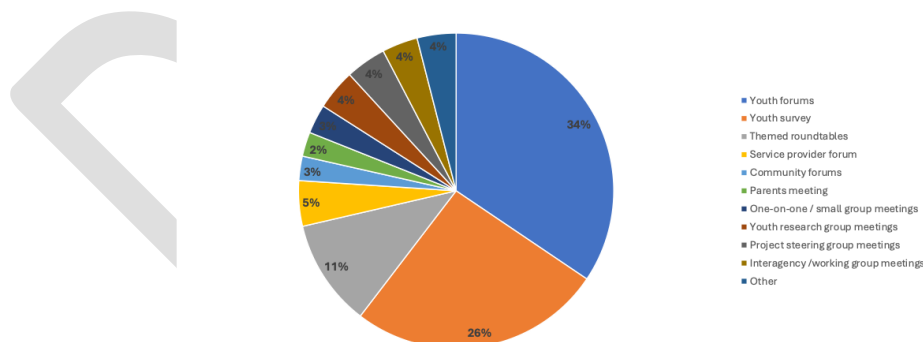
Youth and community engagement

Young people and the broader community were engaged during a 7-month period through face-to-face meetings, community workshops, forums, roundtables, presentations, and online surveys. The *Youth Strategy Engagement Report*, a separate document, includes engagement details, findings and a list of stakeholders engaged in the process.

All together there were 601 engagement touchpoints across the consultation which included:

- 207 young people who participated in youth forums
- 156 young people who completed the youth survey
- 66 young people/service providers/community members who participated in themed roundtables
- 28 people who participated in the service provider forum
- 15 people who participated in the community forums

Touchpoints



Young people's insights into their lived experiences and perspectives informed and grounded the development of the draft Youth Strategy. The draft Youth Strategy was distributed for young people's and community feedback.

This *Zenadth Kes Inner Island Youth Strategy* is the culmination of the youth and community engagement process.

Demographics

2,605

Torres Strait Islander and Aboriginal people living on the Inner Islands.

Source: TSRA (2021)

527

Young people aged 15 to 24 living in Torres Shire Local Government Area*.

Does not include Hammond Island

Source: ABS, Regional population by age and sex (2022)

Data To Be Confirmed

Students attending secondary school on the mainland.

Source: To Be Provided

341

Students enrolled in TAGAI State College, Secondary Campus on Thursday Island.

(Term 3, 2023)

Source: Dept of Education via Dept Seniors, Disability Services & Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander Partnerships

Data To Be Confirmed

Secondary students from outer islands who live on the Inner Islands during the school term to attend TAGAI State College.

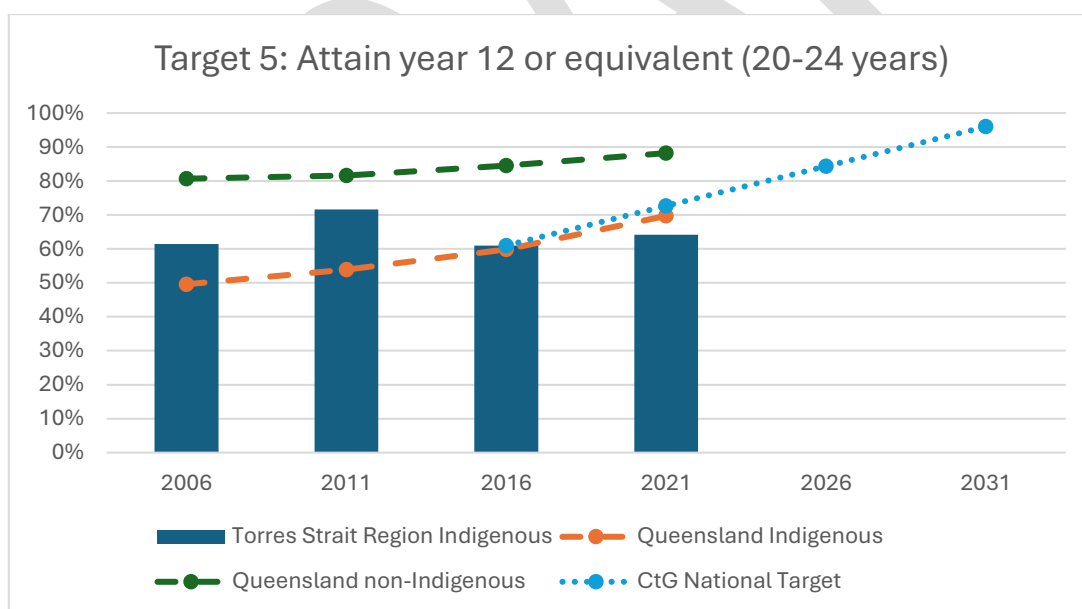
Source: To Be Provided

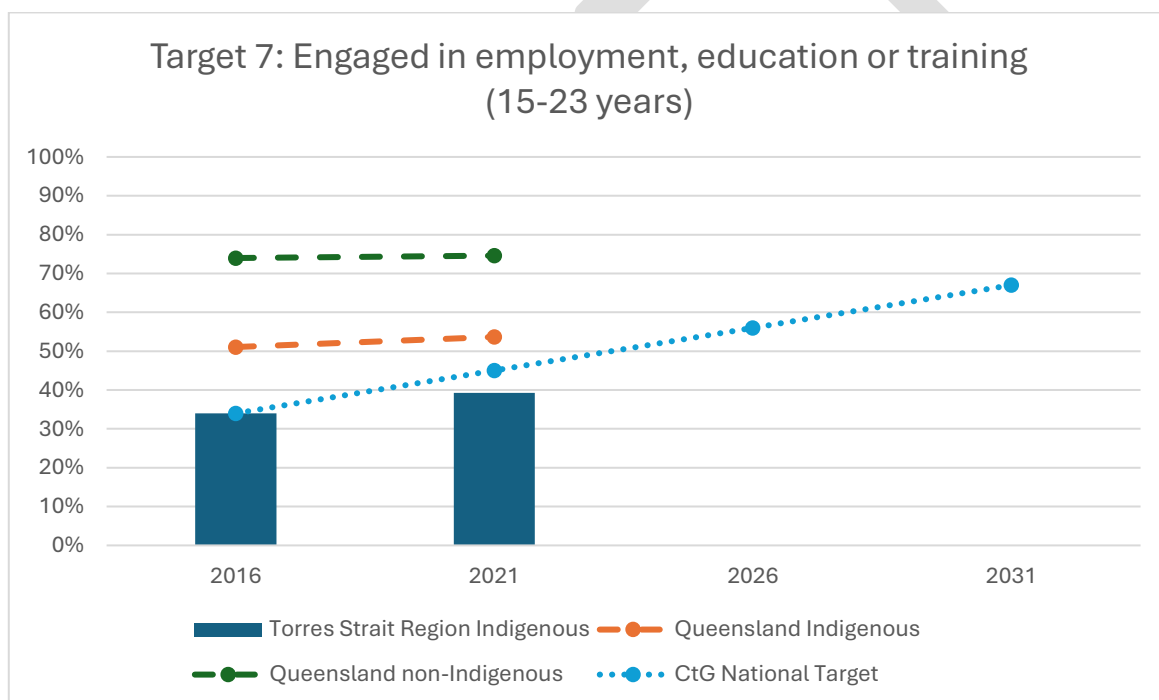
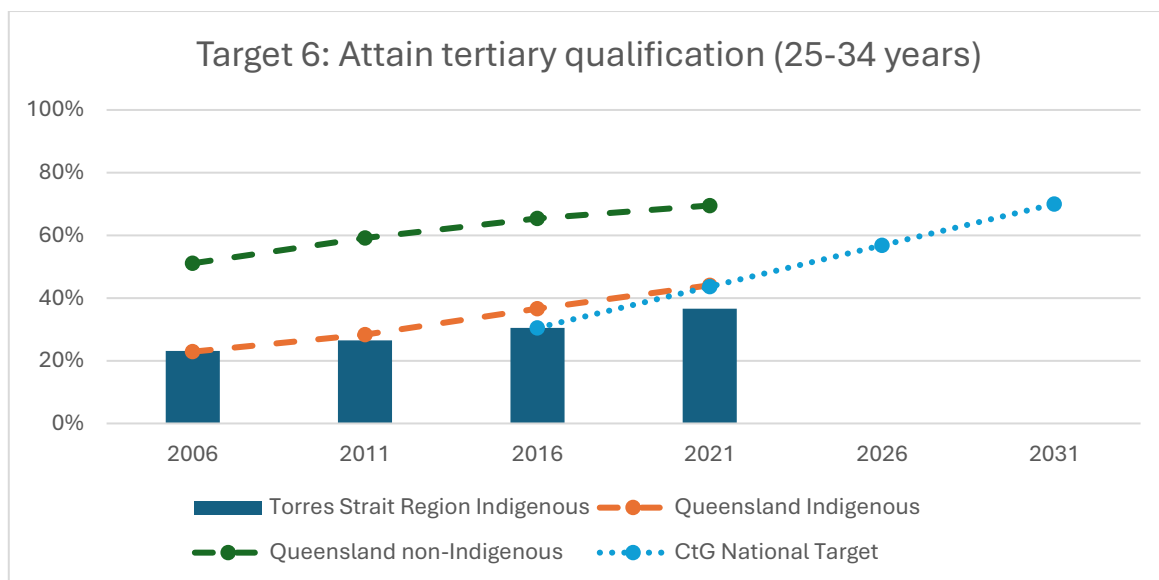
Closing the Gap target measures

Comparative data with other Queensland Indigenous and non-Indigenous communities demonstrates that we are not closing the gap for Torres Strait Islander and Aboriginal young people living in the region. In fact, we are increasingly falling behind. For example:

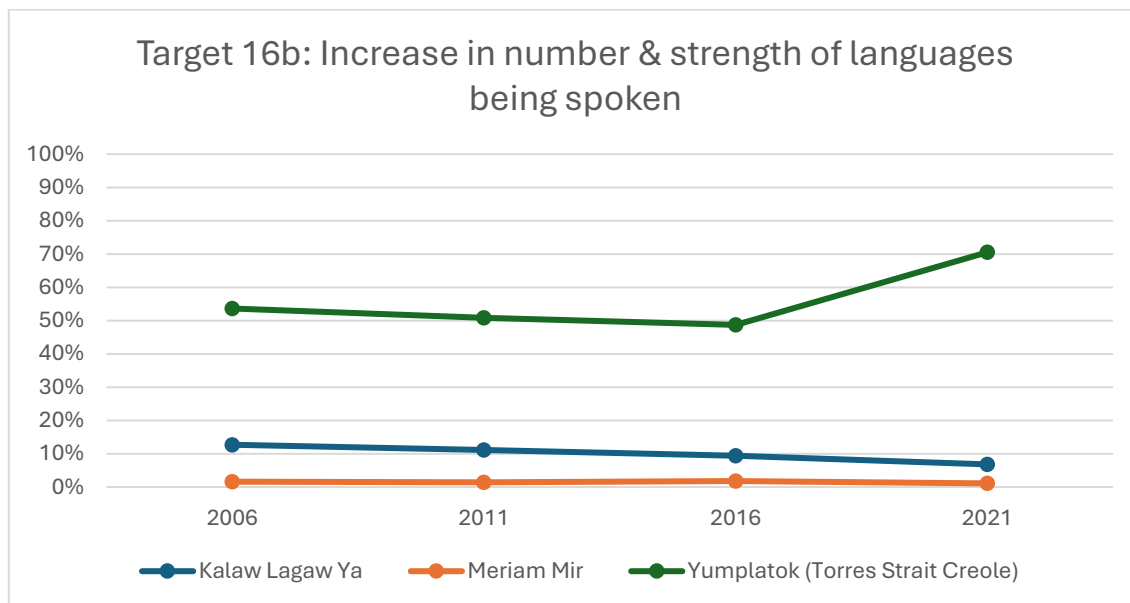
- Attainment of year 12 or equivalent for 20 to 24 year olds was 8% lower in 2021 than it was 10 years previously in 2011; and the Torres Strait Region was already behind the National Closing the Gap target in 2021 by 9%.
- In 2011 27% of young people in the Torres Strait Region, between 25 and 34 years, had a tertiary qualification or equivalent – was almost equal to the average for Queensland's Indigenous population. However, 10 years on, in 2021, the Torres Strait Region had fallen behind the rest of Queensland Indigenous population by 7% AND the Closing the Gap target for that year (44%).
- Whilst we had an improvement in engagement in employment, education and training for young people (15 to 23 years) in the 5 year period to 2021, we remain behind the Queensland Indigenous average by 15% and the Closing the Gap target for the same year by 6%.

We are falling behind and failing our young people. Not only are we not closing the gap between non-Indigenous Australians, but we are also not keeping pace with other Indigenous Queenslanders.





The graph below shows a decline in speaking the two traditional languages of the Torres Strait Region over 15 years to 2021. Concurrently there is a significant increase in Yumplatok (Torres Strait Creole), which is not considered a traditional regional language, between 2016 and 2021.



Drivers that contribute to achieving Closing the Gap targets

19%

Lower student attendance rate for TAGAI State College Secondary Campus compared to Queensland, Semester 1 2023.

Source: Dept of Education via Qld Government Statisticians Office

30%

Students at TAGAI Secondary College who exited school between 2021 and 2023.

Source: Tagai State College

25%

Student Disciplinary Absences for TAGAI Secondary College in 2023.

Source: Tagai State College

9

Young people aged 10-17 years on unsupervised orders in the Torres Region in 2023.

Source: Dept Youth Justice, Employment, Small Business and Training and Qld Treasury concordance-based estimates

12

Unique youth offenders 10-17 years who committed an offence against the person in the Torres Region in 2023.

Source: Qld Policy Service and Qld Treasury concordance-based estimates

15%

The percentage of victims of offences against a person in Torres Region who were aged 0-17 years in 2023.

Source: Qld Policy Service and Qld Treasury concordance-based estimates

Youth Strategy Foundational Principles

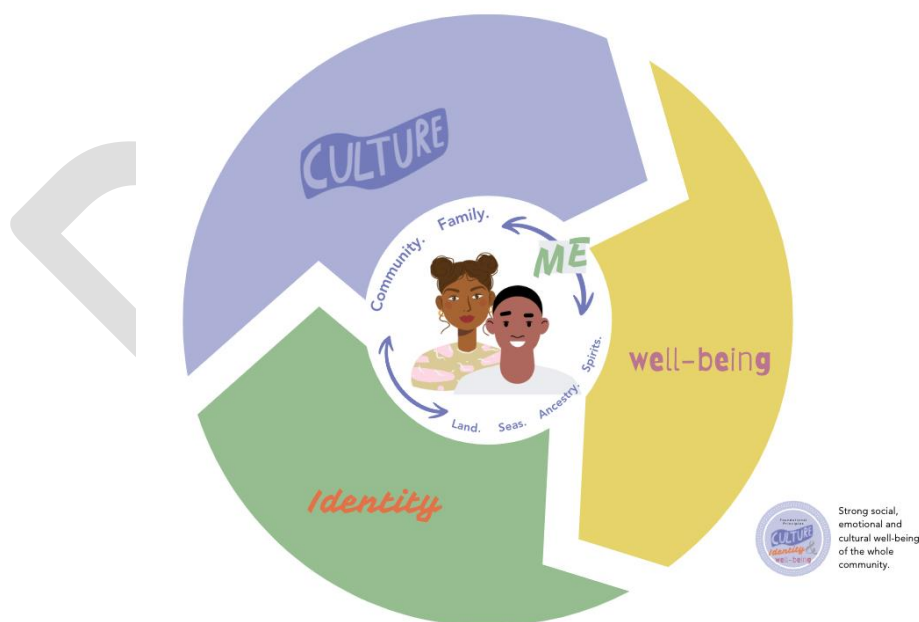
The young people of the Torres Strait Islands want to know who they are and where they are from. They want to learn about their culture, know their language, feel a sense of belonging, be on country, build confidence and skills, take on responsibilities and make good choices about their futures.

Culture shapes young people's sense of self in the world and is part of their identity. When young people know the elements that make up their cultural identity, they can explore who they are and feel grounded in values as they journey through the ups and downs of life. However, when young people are confused about who they are and what purpose they have in community, they can feel disconnected and lost.

We know that culture and identity is a source of strength, resilience, and pride, and underpins health, social and emotional well-being, and overall wellness.

Three foundational principles have been identified by young people and the community as core priorities for the *Youth Strategy* – Culture, Identity and Well-being. When culture and identity is strong, it supports well-being of the self, the family, the community, the land and seas, the spirits, and the ancestors.

This interconnected and important relationship is highlighted in the diagram below:



- *Culture* is fundamental to young person's identity, values, and purpose.
- *Identity* is a key part of a young person's journey of self-discovery, helping them to know who they are, what they value and where they belong.
- *Well-being* is closely linked to young people's identity and the mind, body and spirit must be strong to support a positive journey to adulthood and through life.

When young people, their families, and their communities are empowered through culture, identity, and well-being, they create a nurturing environment that fosters resilience and growth.

*“The Youth Strategy must empower and support families to build cultural strength.”-
Uncle Gabriel Bani*

“We need to prepare to take over the responsibilities.”

Inclusion of diversity

Some groups of young people are often excluded and experience higher threats to their well-being, based on discriminatory factors such as their culture, gender, sexuality, disability, and geographic location. Key populations of young people on the Inner Islands may include:

- Young girls and women
- Young people with disabilities
- Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer, Intersex, Sistergirl, Brotherboy + young people
- Young parents
- Young people not in education, training or employment
- Young people living away from their home island (diaspora community)

Young Torres Strait Islander and / or Aboriginal people visiting or living on the mainland may experience even higher threats to their wellbeing, based on their cultural background in addition to any other intersecting factors.

Young people living on the Inner Islands who do not identify as Torres Strait Islander and/or Aboriginal, may also feel excluded.

Therefore, a strengths based intersectional approach should be taken when interpreting and implementing this Youth Strategy. Young people are diverse and require tailored responses to support their unique needs – accessible, accepting and gender-affirming.

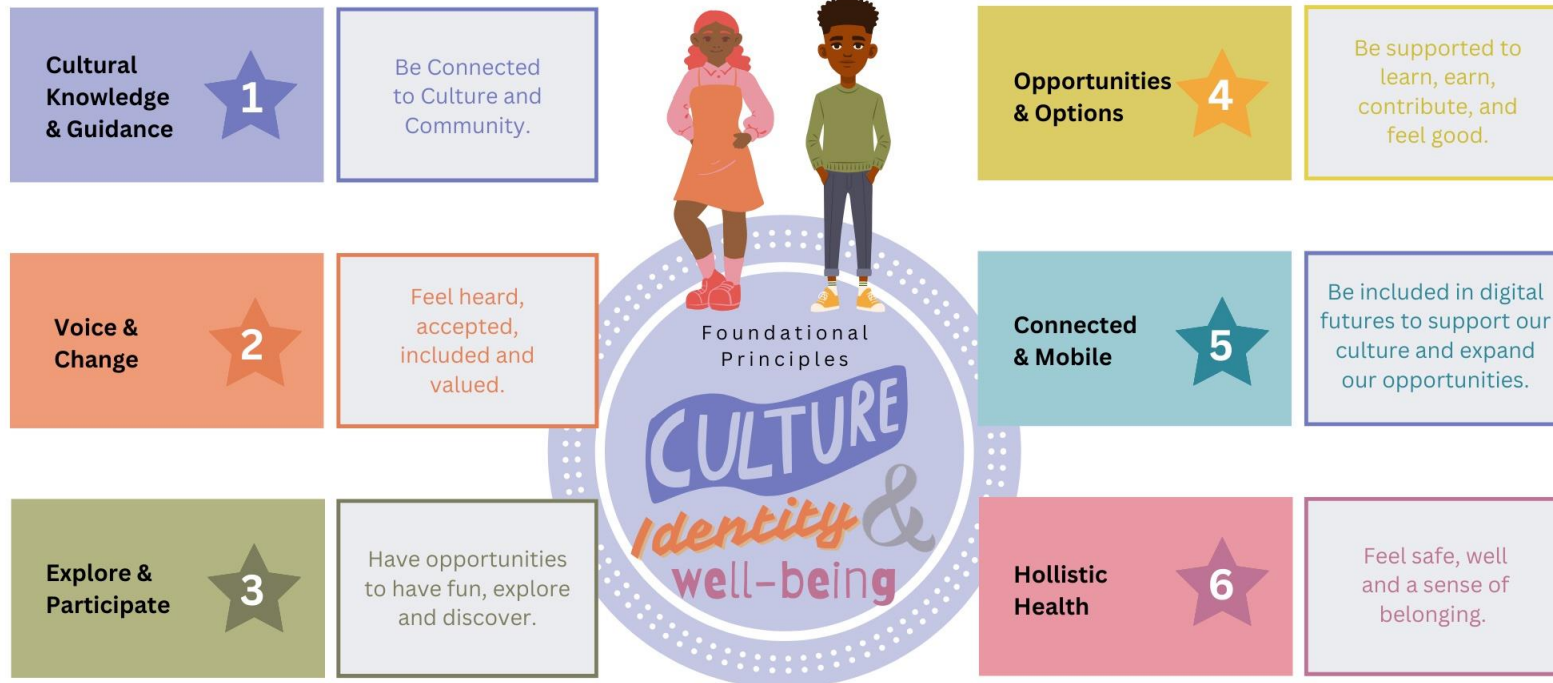
Six Guiding Stars

The *Youth Strategy* is built on six *Guiding Stars*, to support young people on their journeys through life and to adulthood.

Built on the foundations of *Culture, Identity and Wellbeing*, the *Guiding Stars* are designed to support young people to explore interests and develop knowledge, skills, and values for personal growth and well-being.

1. Cultural knowledge and guidance – be connected to culture and community.
2. Voice and change – feel heard, accepted, included, and valued.
3. Explore and participate – have opportunities to have fun, explore and discover.
4. Opportunities and options – be supported to learn, earn, contribute, and feel good.
5. Connected and mobile – be included in digital futures to support our connection to culture and expand our opportunities.
6. Holistic health – feel safe, well and a sense of belonging.

What can help me live my best life, no matter my path, or challenges?



Zenadth Kes Youth Strategy

A culturally-based framework to empower young people with the knowledge, connections, and confidence needed to navigate their unique paths toward a self-determined life.



Strong Cultural Foundations

When young people have a strong foundation in culture, identity, and well-being, they feel culturally connected, confident, and proud.



Guiding Stars

When young people have opportunities to explore and strengthen their identity, they gain the tools, confidence, and support needed to navigate their lives with purpose.



Diversity and Inclusion

When young people are acknowledged and respected for their diverse perspectives, experiences, and voices, we foster their sense of safety, inclusion, and belonging in their identity.

Guiding Star 1: Cultural knowledge and guidance

61% feel connected to their culture

57% of young people identify as speaking their traditional language

27% of young people identify as speaking Meriam Mir

82% of young people identify as knowing their Totem

71% of young people identify as knowing their bloodline, clan or tribe

27% of young people identify as speaking Kalaw Lagaw Ya

74% of young people identify as speaking Yumpla Tok (Torres Strait Kriol / Creole)

Note: The above statistics are from the results of Youth Strategy Survey 2024 and should be used with caution.

Torres Strait Islander and Aboriginal culture has been passed on from generation to generation through storytelling about cultural beliefs, totems, values, customs, rituals, history, practices, relationships, and ways of life.

Young people on the Inner Islands have some understanding of their culture and language, though the extent varies from person to person. While many recognise its importance and are eager to learn more, they often struggle with knowing where to start or who to approach for guidance.

Young people want to feel connected to their culture and make their families proud. They want more time with Elders and community to learn, practice and celebrate. They want to know their traditional language, stories, songs and dances and celebrate cultural traditions with community through activities, celebrations, and events. This includes a recognition and understanding of the different cultures and practices across the island communities.

Young people also want safe places in and out of school to learn, practice, and make mistakes, with the support and encouragement of Elders, families, and community. Holistic cultural projects, excursions, must be prioritised in schools and beyond, as they support lifelong skills and learning.

Cultural knowledge and guidance offer young people creative expression and essential life skills through rich traditions and practices. It fosters resilience, adaptability, relationship-building, and a profound understanding and respect the environment and sustainable living. Storytelling along with traditional and creative skills helps young people express themselves and supports problem-solving and creative thinking.

Each year, young people from eleven years old leave their families to attend high school on Thursday Island or the mainland. This group of young people spend 40 weeks per year for four to six years away from their families, learning another culture which impacts the sense of self and identity.

To create strong and sustainable communities, young people must be strong in traditional language, practices, and traditions.

The key priorities for young people are:

1. Guidance from Elders through the cultural transition from adolescence to adulthood.
2. Support to learn traditional language, cultural practices, and traditions.
3. Inclusion in co-designing local events and activities with community to practice and celebrate culture.
4. Proper opportunities for young people living away from home to connect with their culture and know who they are.

“More activities together with community involvement teaching culture & awareness from a young age so we are taught to be respectful, honest, responsible & courageous”

Guiding Star 2: Voice and Change

Young people shared their concerns about social and cultural issues they are familiar with or have experiences in. These include bullying, racism, domestic violence, mental health challenges, the impacts of pollution and climate, and the rising cost of living. They also shared ideas about environmental and cultural revitalisation.

Young people are aware of and concerned about political impacts on their communities, as they navigate the systematic effects of colonisation that have led to trauma, challenges, disadvantages, and disparities for their families and communities. They experienced both the lead-up and outcomes of the *Voice to Parliament* referendum providing them with lived experience of institutional racism and systematic issues on a national scale.

Today's young people are not only managing longstanding and unjust issues with their families and communities, but they are also confronted with new challenges from social, economic, environmental, and technological changes in recent decades.

Although many young people shared a range of experiences and concerns, many also shared that they were hopeful about their futures and are interested supporting their families, communities, land, and seas. However, young people on the Inner Islands face barriers when it comes to speaking up. They need cultural knowledge and support from family and community, along with youth-led spaces to practice sharing their ideas and build confidence to take on leadership roles.

Young people face layered, intersecting and complex challenges - including the institutional racism, health disparities, domestic violence, the climate crisis, rapid technological advancements, mental health pressures, and economic uncertainty, require innovative responses and culturally responsive solutions from a variety of community voices, including young people.

When young people feel safe, respected, valued, and included, they can confidently contribute to advocacy issues at local, national, and international level, bringing new insights and fresh perspectives to the conversation. Importantly, equitable opportunities must be provided to diverse groups of young people, to build the skills and confidence to speak up.

Young people are a powerful force for change and must be given various platforms to ensure their diverse and important voices are heard.

The key priorities for young people are:

1. Support to build skills, confidence, and agency to speak-up personally, for friends and peers.
2. Inclusion of diverse voices that are genuinely heard and incorporated in policies, programs, and services.
3. Opportunities to contribute to the design of programs, policies and initiatives that respond to local, national and international issues young people care about.
4. Access to youth-led spaces where young people feel safe, accepted and included.
5. A seat at the local, national and international table when considering climate crisis, impacts and possible solutions.

“(We need to) Stop racism - we need a key to a new society. There's light on the other side”

“We want flooding to stop because it's causing damage to our environment. We are building sea walls to stop the tides but please don't do any more harm or damage to Mother Nature.”

Guiding Star 3: Participate and Explore

70% of young people enjoy fishing in their spare time

50% of young people want to participate in creative activities at a Youth Space

85% of young people suggested a Youth Space should be on Thursday Island.

75% of young people want a Youth Space to be a safe place to be with friends

Note: The above statistics are from the results of Youth Strategy Survey 2024 and should be used with caution.

Young people want to be young and have fun. They want more opportunities to access safe spaces to come together to relax with friends outside study or work, to play sport, get creative, to prepare Kai Kai, learn new things, connect and celebrate with community.

Engaging young people in community activities and offering safe spaces where they can be themselves, build confidence, and interact with their peers is essential for their development and well-being. These environments not only support relationships and social skills but also broaden their circles of support building trust with mentors and role models, which is vital in supporting young people's social and emotional well-being on the Inner Islands.

Young people need access to cultural resources such as music, dance, performing arts, and festivals, which can foster cultural confidence, creative expression, and skill development. Additionally, participation in volunteering and part-time jobs can support essential life skills, including teamwork and leadership. However, young people's choices are limited due to a lack of available options on the Inner Islands. This is exacerbated by barriers to access to existing facilities, a lack of facility maintenance, and limited after hours transport between Thursday Island and the neighbouring Inner Islands.

Young people are looking for way to connect with other young people and their community, but programs and activities are often limited or disrupted due to a range of complex geographic and other challenges on the Inner Islands. The transient nature of staff and volunteers supporting youth led programs on the Inner Islands often causes initiatives to start and stop.

Additionally, short-term financial commitment limits opportunities for young people. For example, the last youth hub on Thursday Island closed in 2012 due to lack of ongoing funding for the facility and coordinator.

To ensure continuity of support for young people, it is critical to identify sustainable long term solutions.

Exploring and participating in a range of community activities is vital for young people to uncover their interests, develop skills and build connections as they navigate their journey of personal growth and self-discovery, helping them understand their identity. When young people are empowered with a strong sense of identity, they can design a life that reflects their cultural and personal values, as well as their individual goals.

The key priorities for young people are:

1. Opportunities to come together with friends and peers in a safe environment.
2. Opportunities to explore and express culture, creativity and identity through the creative arts including storytelling, music, song, dance, visual arts, performing arts and film.
3. Opportunities to participate in organised sports - locally, regionally and nationally.
4. Opportunities to learn traditional skills and build cultural knowledge through camping, fishing and hunting.
5. Access to no or low-cost inter and intra inner-island transport to access services, work, arts and cultural activities and sport.

“(We need) something to look forward to doing every day. That includes EVERYONE, not just sport. So organised activities and even a youth centre would be great. Something for all kids to look forward to”

“More activities for the older kids. So, they have something to do and won’t result in bad behaviour because of boredom. More support and understanding for those older kids, because sometimes there’s more to the story than what many of them are letting on”

“More support and feelings of comfort to allow the youth to participate in different activities/games etc, wherever their interest may lie”

Guiding Star 4: Opportunities and Options

48% of young people said the biggest barrier to accessing work is a lack of confidence

30% of young people don't know who to ask for help to find work

Note: The above statistics are from the results of Youth Strategy Survey 2024 and should be used with caution.

It's important for young people to learn, earn, contribute and feel good, with both formal and non-formal pathways serving as essential stepping stones on their journey.

On the Inner Islands, young people have varied experiences with school and work. Some thrive in mainstream educational and career pathways, finding clear direction and success. However, others feel out of place, struggling with conventional systems that don't align with their needs, values, or aspirations.

Remote Australian communities often tackle unique challenges when it comes to education and employment. The geographic isolation of the Torres Strait along with the dispersion the islands, limits opportunities. Additionally, transient and non-Indigenous teachers and workers, socioeconomic factors, healthcare issues, lack of skills and training avenues, discrimination, and transportation barriers create further challenges for young people.

It is crucial for a young person's well-being to address barriers to education and post-school opportunities by offering systems and supports that accommodate diverse abilities, values, and goals.

When cultural mentors and activities are limited on the Inner Islands, young people may struggle to find purpose and be more vulnerable to boredom and self-destructive behaviours. This can lead to risky decisions that can affect the rest of their lives.

By providing a strong cultural and well-being base and a range of opportunities and options, young people have the capacity to make good choices. While some may wish to move to follow career paths or work opportunities, others may want to earn or contribute locally while remaining close to family and their culture.

This includes the need for flexible employment that supports work and life balance to manage family responsibilities.

To improve the quantity and quality of jobs and experiences on the Inner Islands, it is essential to implement and coordinate strategies that support employment, self-employment, remote work, and volunteer ecosystems on the Inner Islands.

Sectors such as innovation and entrepreneurship, renewable energy, climate change, as well as opportunities in the NDIS, Indigenous tourism, arts sector and through the 2032 Brisbane Olympic and Paralympic Games present valuable pathways to explore. Additionally, the Information and Communication Technology Sector presents opportunities for digital inclusion, remote work, and economic growth especially with the rise of artificial intelligence.

There is also an opportunity for government organisations, local service providers, and businesses on the Inner Islands to work together on volunteer, work experience and traineeship programs supporting young people to gain experience and build confidence and skills.

Nurturing young people and providing opportunities for them to live or return to the Inner Islands is important for long-term economic, social, and environmental health of the Torres Strait.

When young people are actively included and offered flexible ways to learn, earn, contribute, and feel good in community, they feel a strong sense of purpose and pride.

The key priorities for young people are:

1. Participation in formal education environments that are deeply grounded in cultural ways of learning and living.
2. Access to quality, flexible employment and lifelong education pathways supported by training and mentoring.
3. Access to training, tools, and infrastructure to create new ideas to explore self-employment opportunities, entrepreneurship, and digital futures.
4. Support to explore non-formal learning to support the development of culture, knowledge, life skills, and competencies for alternate pathways.
5. Opportunities to develop every-day life skills such as communication, decision making, financial literacy, time management, self-care and digital literacy.

“Finding a job on TI (Thursday Island) is hard because there is limited availability”

“(I like my job because I can be) active and fit and interact with other people”

“(We need) More opportunities like courses for kids who finished high and don’t know what to do after school”

“I will go to the mainland to study to be a nurse and I will return to look after my family and community on Hammond”

Guiding Star 5: Connected and Mobile

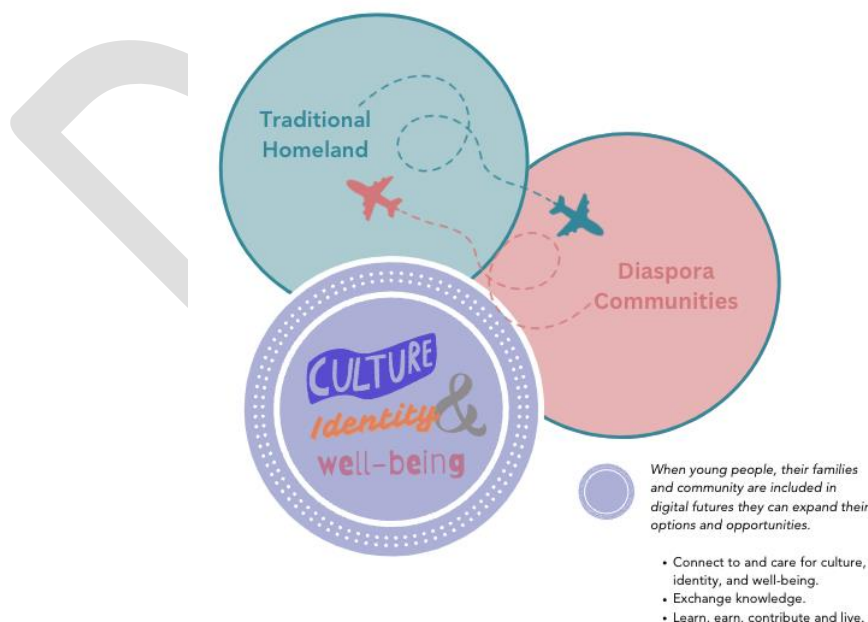
With 17 inhabited islands across an area of 48,000 square kilometres of ocean, many young people must leave their home islands behind and travel to Thursday Island or the mainland to attend high school. Others relocate after school for further education or employment, only returning for holidays or family and cultural obligations.

During this time, young people join thousands of Torres Strait Islanders that form part of a mobile group called a diaspora community. The term diaspora refers to the dispersion of Torres Strait Islander and Aboriginal people from their traditional homeland to mainland Australian and beyond.

Navigating multiple cultures, also known as biculturalism, can be both rewarding and challenging, as young people learn to balance their own culture with the influences of the community they are living in.

Providing tailored and culturally responsive support for young people as they transition to and from communities or diaspora communities is essential for nurturing their *Culture, Identity, and Well-being*, including their sense of belonging.

For young people living across communities or in diaspora communities, technology not only provides a vital link to their families and culture but also facilitates a two-way street for knowledge exchange. This allows diaspora community members to share new experiences and insights with their home communities.



Supporting digital inclusion on the Inner Islands can enhance cultural connection and address issues of opportunity, access, knowledge, and skills. It has the potential to empower and support young people who wish to continue living in the Torres Strait through education, health, innovation, business, employment, and volunteer opportunities.

The Inner Islands must address a range of barriers in relation to digital inclusion, including infrastructure, high costs of services and devices, training challenges, lack of trained staff and volunteers, and dedicated spaces and equipment to learn.

Young people demonstrated a strong interest in technology, utilising phones and laptops for education and social connection. However, they also face challenges with affordability of data and are concerned about the impacts of social media including cyberbullying or mental health.

With skills, training and support, digital tools can be safely used to support lifelong learning. It has the potential to foster new innovations including culturally respectful technologies to help young people to learn and practice cultural knowledge and language.

Digital inclusion expands young people's options and opportunities, enabling them to participate in the global digital society while maintaining their connection to culture.

The key priorities for young people are:

1. Access to quality digital infrastructure, skills development to enable participation in a global digital society.
2. Connect diaspora communities with traditional homelands for culture, identity, and well-being, as well as to support for mutual knowledge exchange.
3. Support to develop digital knowledge, skills, and tools necessary to manage social media and stay safe online.

Guiding Star 6: Holistic Health

43% of young people believe mental health is a problem for young people

62% of young people said that bullying is a problem

66% of young people believe alcohol and other drugs are the most significant problem they are facing

65% of young people said they would talk to friends or parent / relative / family member if they need help.

19% of young people said they would not ask for help.

Note: The above statistics are from the results of Youth Strategy Survey 2024 and should be used with caution.

Supporting the transitional period in a young person's life is vital for setting them up for their best life. For young people without access to basic needs or positive family community mentors, overcoming health and well-being challenges can be even more difficult.

The majority of young people on the Inner Islands have experienced or know someone who has experienced discrimination, racism, bullying and/or cyberbullying. Challenges in their home environments, including domestic and family violence are also a significant concern for young people.

Some groups of young people experience higher threats to their well-being, based on discriminatory factors such as their culture, gender, sexuality, disability, and where they live.

Students identified that they are more likely to seek help from a friend than a service provider for issues relating to cyber bullying, self-harm, suicide ideation, abuse, domestic violence, bullying and anxiety. However, they would go to a service provider for support relating to sexual health, alcohol and other drugs, and anger management. Teachers that are trusted by students are likely to be sources of support for issues such as mental health, peer pressure, coercive control and informed consent.

An intersectional approach based on equity, diversity and inclusion and holistic health should be used when designing support for specific groups of young people on the Inner Islands. Young people require tailored responses to support their unique needs that are culturally appropriate, accessible, accepting and gender-affirming.

Supporting young people's holistic health requires consideration of the multiple information and support sources young people access.

The key priorities for young people are:

1. Recognise and support young people's regular information and support sources such as peers, family members and trusted community relationships.
2. Access to preventative health, sexual health, mental health and general health care in discrete young people friendly spaces.
3. Promotion of safety and address bullying and violence in the home, school and community settings.
4. Support to navigate and exit the justice system and re-connect with family and community.
5. Acknowledge the skills, knowledge and work of women in maintaining societal health, safety and cohesiveness.

"I talk to myself and do calm things like go to the beach with my dogs and watch movies"

From words to action

Perhaps the greatest challenge for the Inner Islands is a need to demonstrate to young people a commitment to taking immediate action whilst also addressing the systemic barriers faced by the region. This will require agreement, commitment and investment from service providers and all levels of government.

Importantly, a diversity of young people must be meaningfully engaged in the design of solutions to issues that affect them.

Addressing systemic barriers

A number of organisations provide services to young people as part of their broader remit – some are Torres Strait based and some are mainland. However, there is no organisation with specific responsibility to understand the needs of young people, coordinate data collection and analysis, work across agencies to address need, and to advocate for resources and investment into the region.

To address the unique environmental, economic, and cultural contexts of the Inner Islands, a consistent, coordinated and responsive approach must be established to ensure the continuity and cultural responsiveness of services, programs, and activities on the Inner Islands. This Strategy reflects:

1. Regular opportunities for young people to meaningfully engage in the review and co-design of programs, services, and activities; such as feedback forms, voting options, brainstorming workshops etc.
2. Data sharing across funding agencies and service deliverers to identify barriers and inform decisions, ensuring that programs are designed to be inclusive and accessible, particularly for priority groups.
 - Ensure all service providers have feedback from priority groups embedded in KPIs
3. Commitment to long-term funding commitments (proposed 5 years) to ensure the barriers to continuity, staffing, and transport are addressed.
4. Adaptability in funding agreements and service delivery arrangements to ensure services to young people can be provided in relaxed, culturally responsive, youth-friendly environments that are flexible to need and opportunity.
5. Developing youth leadership capability
 - youth board traineeships
 - youth governance training scholarships (AICD or similar)
 - youth development scholarships (similar to TSRA women's development program)
 - youth quotas to boards and decision-making bodies (non-executive or non-voting seats where applicable)

Initiatives for action

Five key initiatives were identified throughout the consultation that would have meaningful and measurable impact to meeting young people's needs and aspirations in the Inner Islands. These initiatives are considered as areas of priority.

1. **Delivery of School Holiday Culture Camps** which include learning language, cultural practices and traditions (hosted by Traditional Owners and Elders);
2. **Co-design and pilot a 'Youth-led Space'** on Thursday Island that includes access to culturally responsive programs, activities, information and resources driven by young people and in collaboration with community;
3. **Increase pooled investment** into organised sports, enabling clubs to recruit and support the essential 'people powered infrastructure' (coaches, officials, volunteers). In the first two years focus on rugby league, basketball, netball, Australian Rules, and touch football.
4. **Establish a community operated youth creative arts program.**
5. **Investigate and trial a free after-hours transport** from Hammond Island and Horn Island to Thursday Island for key youth opportunities (school holiday programs, training and workshops, sporting events, and key cultural events).

Monitoring progress and impact

The responsibility for servicing and supporting young people in the Torres Strait sits across multiple organisations, agencies and all levels of government. Therefore, an interagency approach is best placed to monitor the progress of commitments and actions, and measure the impact of Youth Strategy implementation over the next five years. This may be undertaken through appropriate governance and reporting mechanisms, for example publishing an annual statement of achievement to ensure transparency and accountability to young people and the broader community.

Appendix 1: Terminology

Term	Definition
Accessible	Making sure everyone has the same opportunities to access services, information, spaces and fully participate in their communities.
Advocate / Advocacy	Taking action to support a cause or address an issue that is affecting a person or community.
Agencies and Departments	Organisations and groups in the Australian Government responsible for different policies and programs.
Bi-Culturalism	Belonging to, representing, or understanding two different cultures.
Cultural Safety	Creating an environment that is safe for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. This means there is no assault, challenge or denial of their identity and experience.
Decision-making	The process of making choices about government policies and programs.
Digital Inclusion	Ensuring equitable, meaningful, and safe access to use, lead, and design of digital technologies, services, and associated opportunities for everyone, everywhere.
Inclusive	Ensuring everyone is valued and supported to participate, free from discriminatory beliefs, attitudes and practices.
Interagency	Collaboration and cooperation between multiple agencies/organisations.
Lived experience	Personal knowledge about the world gained through direct, first-hand involvement or experience.
LGBTIQ+SB	An abbreviation which is used to describe lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans, intersex, queer, or any other sexually or gender diverse people, including Sistergirls and Brotherboys.
National Agreement on Closing the Gap	An Australian Government strategy that aims to reduce disparity between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and non-Indigenous Australians on key health, education and economic opportunity targets.
Policies and programs	Plans and activities made by the Australian Government to address different issues or provide support to people.
Self-determination	The fundamental right of people to shape their own lives.
Young people	Young people are between the ages of 12-25.
Diaspora	Refers to the dispersion of Torres Strait Islander and Aboriginal people from their traditional homeland to mainland Australian and beyond.

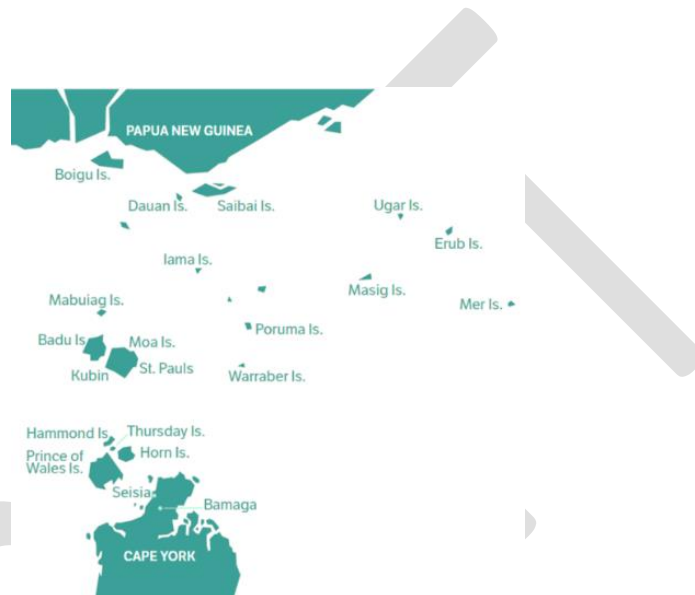
Appendix 2: About the Region

The Torres Strait Regional Authority

The TSRA is the lead Australian Government agency in the Torres Strait Region for Indigenous Affairs. It is a statutory agency that operates under the direction of a democratically elected Torres Strait Islander and Aboriginal Board.

The Torres Strait Regional Authority's Torres Strait Development Plan 2023 – 2028 ('the Development Plan'), developed by the TSRA Board and local communities, sets TSRA's organisational vision and priorities.

The Torres Strait Region



The Torres Strait Region stretches 150 kilometres northwards from Cape York Peninsula to Papua New Guinea and up to 300 kilometres from east to west. It includes 5 Traditional Owner nations of Kaiwalagal, Maluylgal, Guda Maluylgal, Kulkaigal and Kemer Kemer Meriam.

The map below shows the Inner Islands of Waiben (Thursday Island), Ngurapai (Horn Island), Kiririri (Hammond Island) and Muralag (Prince of Wales Island).

Ailan Kastom

The recognition of Ailan Kastom (island custom) is enshrined in the *Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Act 2005 (Cth)*. Ailan Kastom means the body of custom, traditions, observance and belief of some or all of the Torres Strait Islanders living in the Torres Strait area, and includes customs, traditions, observances and beliefs relating to particular person, areas, objects or relationships.

Cultural Empowerment Principle

The Youth Strategy has been developed and delivered in accordance with the principle of cultural empowerment and respect to the cultural protocols of the Kaurareg peoples whose country covers the Inner Islands where most of high-school aged young people reside during school terms.

Appendix 3: A Youth Space for the Inner Islands

The establishment of a Youth Space for young people on the Inner Islands has broad support from young people, service providers and the broader community. There is also general agreement that it should be based on Thursday Island (85% of survey respondents) and that after hours transport should be provided between Horn Island and Hammond Island.

Young people would like a Youth Space to be open on the weekends, after school/work and early evenings.

Young people are clear about their aspirations for a youth space:

- Primarily it would be a **safe place to be with friends (75% of survey respondents)**. A space where they could come together with other young people to relax, study and do activities outside of school.
- They would like to participate in **Fun activities (67% of survey respondents)** and **Creative activities (48% of survey respondents)**. Activities include art, music, sports, gaming and cooking. They would also like to **learn new things (44% of survey respondents)**.
- They would like access to both organised structured activities as well as have options to 'do my own thing'.
- They would like access to computers and technology, a gym, library, a cinema, and a beauty salon. They are aware that some of these facilities might not be possible due to cost.
- The design of a youth space would need to include quiet spaces, noisy spaces and a kitchen to cook 'Kai Kai'.
- **Getting help with homework (29% of survey respondents)** and **getting confidential help (33% of survey respondents)** were less of a priority for young people.

In contrast, community representatives expressed a need for a youth space to provide services such as health and mental health support, school tutoring, career and employment assistance, and life skills training.

It will be critical that young people are central to the development of the Youth Space – both in terms of concept AND the detail of location, design and offering. There are numerous failed 'youth spaces' throughout Australia designed by well-meaning adults that fail because they did not collaborate with a diverse group of young people in the design process.

Young people on the Inner Islands are particularly excited about the idea of a youth space and want to be actively involved in its design should it go ahead.

Appendix 4: How to use the Youth Strategy

The Youth Strategy is an evidence base of strategic priorities for the Inner Islands which can be used by different stakeholder groups.

Stakeholder	How to use the strategy
Young People from the Inner Islands	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Advocate for what they want and need from their community, school, education providers, government, employers, service providers, and community organisations. • Create volunteer projects at school, TAFE, university, or community • Create a start-up or small business opportunity that supports the objectives of the Youth Strategy and leverage government funding.
Torres Strait Regional Authority	Enable TSRA to invest in or advocate for investment in priorities for Young People.
Elders, families and communities	Create and deliver cultural events, programs, services, in partnership with service providers/community organisation, to pass on cultural knowledge to Young People.
Government and Policy Makers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Inform policy decisions for Young People from the Inner Islands at Local, State and Commonwealth levels. • Identify areas for government support, in collaboration with young people and key stakeholders.
Service Providers, Community Organisations	In coordination with other local service providers/community organisations, deliver on priorities
Education Providers	Leverage insights from the Youth Strategy to support young peoples learning journey.
Employers	Leverage insights to support workplace design and practices.